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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine whether self-concepts of Head Start children differed from self-concepts of nursery school children. A total of 90 children attending Head Start programs and 70 children attending proprietary nursery schools participated in the study. The preschool form of the Children's Self-Social Constructs Test, a measure assessing multidimensional aspects of self-concept, was administered. While multivariate analysis of variance with age, group, and sex as factors revealed no age differences, differences with respect to group were found on seven dimensions of self-concept. In comparison with children attending proprietary nursery schools, Head Start children earned lower scores on self-esteem and social interest; identified less with mother, father, teacher, and friends; and revealed greater preference for teacher. Sex differences were found on two items: boys indicated greater preference for father and greater social interest than did girls. Results are briefly discussed in terms of their significance for children's later adjustment and academic achievement. (Author/RH)

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SELF-CONCEPTS OF HEAD START AND NURSERY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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SELF-CONCEPTS OF HEAD START AND NURSERY SCHOOL CHILDREN

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine whether self-concepts of Head Start children differed from self-concepts of nursery school children. Ninety children who were attending Head Start and 70 who were attending proprietary nursery schools participated in the study. The preschool form of the Children's Self-Social Constructs Test (CSSCT), assessing multidimensional aspects of self-concept was administered. Multivariate Analysis of Variance with age, group and sex as factors revealed no differences on the basis of ages of the children. Differences with respect to group were found on seven dimensions of self-concept. Head Start children earned lower scores with self esteem and social interest than did children attending proprietary nursery schools. Head Start children identified less with Mother, Father, Teacher and Friends than did nursery school children. Head Start children revealed greater preference for teacher than did nursery school children. Sex differences in favor of boys were found indicating greater preference for Father and greater social interest than girls. These results may be significant for later adjustment and for academic achievement.

SELF-CONCEPTS OF HEAD START AND NURSERY SCHOOL CHILDREN

A personality variable which is significant for the study of behavior during childhood is self-concept. Self theorists note that the self provides a core within the life space of an individual around which other perceptions are organized and influence behavior.

Combs and Snygg (1959), Maslow (1959), Kelly (1951 and Rogers (1951) have reported that behavior and learning are functions of the self. Those writers indicate that a person who is successful usually has a positive view of the self which probably has evolved from a variety of satisfying and successful experiences, from ability to cope with a variety of vicissitudes of life and from personal attributes of self worth. Persons with high self-concepts maintain failure experiences in perspective and continue to see themselves as competent human beings and as persons of worth. Because they are able to cope with life events they generally do, all the while accumulating success and internal reactions that enhance the already positive self-concept.

On the other hand, persons who feel inadequate tend to view themselves in a negative manner. Lacking in self worth they are less able to cope and therefore see themselves as unliked or unwanted. They set low levels of aspiration and expect to perform poorly (Rosenberg, 1979). Such a focus causes them to lose touch with their strengths and abilities. The end result is expectation of encountering difficulties in life's

endeavors and also of failure. As one constantly encounters failure, such experience tends to bring about feelings of inadequacy and helplessness, thus further lowering the self-concept.

Research, theory and observations reveal that many factors influence the way one feels about one's self., i. e., one's self-concept. It was Cooley (1902) who is well known for his principle of the "looking glass self," which postulates that an individual comes to see, to know and to respond to one's self as s/he perceives other's reactions to him/herself. Cooley's sociological theory of the development of the self has been strongly supported by empirical research which has provided a framework within which others have studied self-concept.

In performing research on self-concept many writers stress the importance of "significant others" in development of self-concept. By "significant others" we consider an individual's siblings, parents (Sullivan, 1953), teachers (Denzin, 1966) and friends (Manis, 1955). In discussing the topic Rosenberg (1979) distinguishes between two aspects of significance: valuation (referring to whether an opinion of another person is valued) and credibility (whether the opinion of another person is respected). Rosenberg notes that a valued individual is someonw whose favorable opinions are strongly desired by another, those opinions are cared about and make a difference to an individual. While respect involves placing confidence in the judgment of another individual. For example, a child's opinions of him/herself may be influenced by the belief about the teacher's opinions of that child, on the basis that the child attributes superiority to the teacher's insight and judgment. The child comes to regard the

teacher as a "significant other" person (p. 86).

During the first two years of life the family serves as "significant others" and influences development of self-concept in several ways. Felker (1974) notes that the family serves as primary models for the child to emulate, as primary agents of feedback so that the child is able to know that his/her behavior influences others. In addition, the family serves as primary evaluators of the child's behaviors. Parents determine whether the child's behavior is right or wrong on the basis of parental values.

Research on self-concept among preschool children has proceeded in at least three directions: as predictors of later academic achievement and whether sex and grade differences are found. However, inconsistent results have emerged from those interest areas. For example, Bridgeman and Shipman (1978) found that early self-concept scores (at preschool, kindergarten and first grade) contributed significantly as predictors of third grade academic performance. Support for that position is reported by Ozehosky and Clark (1970) who found a relationship between self-concept and academic achievement in kindergarten. On the other hand Williams (1973) found no correlation between scores of young children's self-concept and their first or second grade reading achievement. An interesting finding comes from Kifer (1975) whose research results revealed that students who are successful in academic activities develop positive personality characteristics, with self-concept being one of those. Students who are unsuccessful develop negative characteristics. Under this conception, achievement is an antecedent of self-concept, while positive personality characteristics are

consequence of self-concept.

Findings concerning sex and grade differences in self-concept scores are also available. Elrod and Crase (1980) found that four and five-year old boys had higher self-concept scores than did girls of the same ages. Drummond and McIntire (1980) found inconsistencies in grade differences in self-concept scores of kindergarten and first grade children. Those researchers found that girls in first grade had lower mean scores than did girls in kindergarten. On the other hand boys in first grade had higher mean scores than did boys in kindergarten

Continued research with preschool children is necessary in order to contribute to the knowledge base about self-concept. Results of such research may aid in a search for explanations about their later academic achievement and adjustment to life's events. Where needed during the school years, intervention may be implemented. In view of the significance of the role of self-concept in personality development and academic achievement, the purpose of the present study was to determine whether self-concepts of Head Start children differed from self-concepts of children who attend privately operated nursery schools. The thought was that if differences were found, intervention strategies designed to enhance self-concept may be implemented. Specifically two null hypotheses were investigated. The first was that no significant differences exist between self-concept scores of children attending Head Start and those attending privately operated nursery schools. The second was that no differences exist between age and sex of the children with respect to their self-concept scores.

METHOD

Subjects

Two groups of preschool children participated in this study. Ninety children (29 Caucasian; 61 Non-white) who were enrolled in a Head Start program in Northwest Ohio comprise the experimental group. Their ages ranged from 43 to 60 months ($\bar{X}$ = 52.27; S.D. = 6.01). Less than 10 percent of the Head Start children were from families whose incomes were above the poverty level; the remainder qualified for admission to Head Start on the basis of established poverty level incomes. Seventy children who were attending proprietary nursery schools in Northwest Ohio (69 Caucasian; 1 black) represent the comparison group. Ages of the latter group of children range from 43 to 66 months ($\bar{X}$ = 52.07; S.D. = 8.55). Of the total number of children in the study (N = 160), 94 were male and 66 were female. Social class position of both groups of children ranged from upper middle class to lower social class position, based on employment and education of heads of households.

Measures

The preschool form of the Children's Self-Social Constructs Test (CSSCT) was employed in this study (Long, Henderson & Ziller, 1967). The CSSCT is a nonverbal technique for measuring self-concept and derives from a theory of "self-other orientation." That theory emphasizes the importance of interaction of an individual with other persons in the development of self-concept. Ideas incorporated in the self-other orientation formulations are in agreement with those expressed in one of Adler's basic concepts (Adler, 1927) , particularly with respect to

social interest.

Adlerian theory considers social interest as the basis of human existence. Social interest involves such matters as interpersonal and social relationships as well as identification with significant persons--family, friends and teachers. Social interest also involves embeddedness and feelings of belonging to a community of people (Leibin, 1981). It is a "normative ideal and a metaphysical entity" (Kazan, 1978, p. 4). It is a by-product of meaningful relationships among people. "Social interest is not born, but is an innate potentiality which has to be developed" (Adler, 1956, p. 134, cited in Kazan, 1978). At birth an individual is embedded in a social milieu represented by family members who initiate social interest in the newborn. "Social interest remains throughout life. It becomes differentiated, limited or expanded and in favorable cases, extends not only to family members but to the larger group, to the nation and to all of mankind. It can go on further, extending itself to animals, plants and inanimate objects and finally even to the cosmos" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 138).

Moreover, social interest denotes the innate aptitude through which the individual becomes responsive to reality, which is primarily the social world. "Like other psychological processes it is a part of the individual's equipment" and the most important part. Social interest is used by individuals in their striving for superiority or perfection which is also socially neutral (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

In the present research ten components derived from the CSSCT were investigated and represent the dependent variables. They were: (1) Self-esteem, (2) identification with mother,

(3) with father, (4) with teacher and (5) with friends; (6) social interest, (7) preference for mother, (8) for father, (9) for teacher and (10) for friends. Independent variables were groups of children (Head Start children and those who were attending proprietary nursery schools), age and sex of the children.

The method employed for measuring self-concept requires the child to perform two types of nonverbal tasks. While observing arrays of circles arranged vertically, horizontally or triangularly on separate 8" x 11" pages in a test booklet (depending on the test item), the child chooses a circle from each array to represent the self. In addition, the child indicates his/her identification with mother, father, teacher or friends (pictorially represented) by pointing to selected stimuli representing the self. The "self" is placed near imaginary stimulus pictures of each indicated "person" (mother, father, teacher or friend). An assumption which underlies this method of assessing self-concept is that a person may communicate one's self-social system" nonverbally and that from an analysis of one's topological arrangements of imaginary self and others, certain inferences may be made about the person's self-concept. For example, an arrangement which places the imaginary self close to another person is assumed to represent psychological closeness to that person (Long & Henderson, 1970, p. 308). A brief description of each test item, directions for administration and scoring the test follows. Also, reliability data are submitted.

Self-esteem

Self-esteem is regarded as an individual's perception of one's worth, which derives from a social context. If one

believes oneself to be highly valued that person's self-esteem is believed to be high. Conversely, if one believes oneself as worthless that person is said to demonstrate low self esteem.

Stimuli for the measure of self-esteem in this study consist of a vertical row of five circles depicted on a sheet of paper (8½" x 11"). The child is asked to pretend that the circles represent children and to choose one to represent him/herself. Positions of circles at the top of the array are regarded as representing higher self-esteem than lower positions. A score of 1-5 (from bottom to top) is possible for each of four presentations. A total self-esteem score is obtained by summation of scores from four different presentations, thus yielding a maximum possible score of 20.

Identification

Identification involves modeling behavior which includes selecting an appropriate model that facilitates the process of socialization (Zigler, 1973, p. 34). During a child's early developmental years parents are thought to serve as the child's models. However, with expansion of the child's life space, identification models may be found among persons external to the family. The process of positive identification is said to lead to important outcomes for self-concept: (1) a sense of belonging which provides feelings of a secure place from which the child may explore the environment and (2) feelings of security which provide the child with self-perceived power as parental wishes become those adopted by the child (Felker, 1974, p. 45).

Tasks in the CSSCT measuring identification consist of a horizontal row of five circles depicted on a sheet of paper. A stimulus picture pretending to represent a child's mother, father,

teacher or friends (each on a separate page) is placed within a circle sixth circle at the extreme left of a row of five circles. The examiner, while pointing to the stimulus picture, says to the subject: "Pretend that this is your mother, father, teacher or friend (as appropriate). You pick a circle to be you, whichever you like". One point is scored if the subject chooses the self next to the stimulus figure. Five points are earned if the subject chooses the self in the extreme right circle. Scores may range from 1-5. Two pages of each stimulus person are included in test materials, thus maximizing the score for each "person" as 10 (2 x 5 pages). Low scores indicate greater identification with the stimulus person. High scores indicate less identification with the chosen "person."

Social Interest

Social interest is said to represent the degree to which an individual perceives one's self as belonging with and representing group members in contrast to one's self perception as an individual. Adler (In Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 449) regards social interest as inherent in every society and stresses the importance of social interest for personality development. Persons who demonstrate social interest are believed to be willing to become involved with others and to aid in generating a system through which norms prevail and influence group behavior. "Whether social interest will be potent or insignificant depends on whether it has been cultivated or has remained undeveloped" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 449).

The CSSCT tasks which measure social interest consist of an arrangement of three circles representing "children" and are placed at apexes forming an imaginary equilateral triangle.

The subject is asked to point to a circle to represent the self anywhere on the page. Pointing to a circle within the triangle of "persons" is interpreted as demonstrating social interest and a score of one is earned for each of four pages of stimuli for having done so. A score of zero is recorded for each page if the child points outside the triangular area. Maximum possible score with four pages of stimuli is four.

Preference for Others

Children eventually begin to make friendship choices and to form social relationships with teachers and peers while gradually moving away from parental dependency. Also, children often seem to enjoy the presence of other children and to learn that one becomes part of a "world that is larger than the family" (Felker, 1974, p. 52).

The CSSCT tasks measuring preference items require the child to make choices between pairs of four stimulus forms depicting mother, father, teacher and friends. Each stimulus "person" is depicted within a rectangular area (4" x 6") and each pair is presented on a separate page, with each stimulus "person" occurring three times. The child is asked to place the self, by pointing, to "whichever person you want." The format is a forced choice between all possible pairs of four "persons." One point is earned by the child for each chosen stimulus. Scores are summed for each person, with the maximum score for each "person" being six. Preference items are not completely independent, which means the more a person chooses one "person" the more often others will not be chosen. Theoretically, the placement of the self with another is interpreted as indicating preference for that person (Long, Henderson,

& Ziller, 1967, p. 20)

Reliability coefficients

One aspect of empirical meaning involves reliability estimates. Developers of the CSSCT (Long, Henderson & Ziller, Manual undated) report that for reliability coefficients, tests of internal consistency were chiefly employed as well as some retesting. Split-half reliability coefficients, corrected for length reveal the following: For Self-Esteem, .77; for identification, with mother, .52, with father, .85, with teacher, .55 and with friends, .73; for Social Interest, .75. No data are reported for the preference items.

Procedures

Within two weeks from the beginning of an academic term all subjects were examined individually using the preschool form of the CSSCT. Testing of both groups of children was performed in a room near the child's classroom. Total time required to test each child was approximately 10 minutes. Sex of each child was noted on test materials at the time of assessment. Upon completion, subjects' birthdates and ethnic group membership were obtained from agency personnel.

RESULTS

In order to determine whether the factor of race of the children in the Head Start program may have confounded the results, a one way ANOVA was performed with group as a factor. Upon revelation that differences were not found a Multivariate ANOVA was performed with age, sex and group as factors in order to determine whether self-concepts of Head Start children differed from self-concepts of children who were attending nursery schools. All main effects and interactions between independent

variables were included in the statistical model. The null hypothesis (i.e., no overall effect) was rejected for group and sex differences. No significant differences were found with respect to ages of the children. Significant differences due to group membership of the children were found for the following items: Self-esteem, identification with mother, father, teacher and friends, with social interest and with the item, preference for teacher (Table 1). Head Start children earned lower

Table 1

Summary of Analysis of Variance of CSSCT Items

CSSCT Items	Source	df	SS	F	p
Self-esteem	Group	1	87.84	4.98	.0271
Identification with:					
Mother	Group	1	525.61	98.67	.0001
Father	Group	1	454.18	121.08	.0001
Teacher	Group	1	407.20	81.19	.0001
Friends	Group	1	1.41	1.89	.0001
Social interest	Sex	1	7.85	8.15	.0085
	Group	1	7.93	8.23	.0047
Preference for:					
Father	Sex	1	5.54	8.08	.0051
Teacher	Group	1	3.98	5.22	.0238

self-esteem scores ($p < .05$), demonstrated less identification with mother, father, teacher and friends ($p < .05$) and less social interest ($p < .05$) than did nursery school children. Head Start children indicated greater preference for teacher than did nursery school children. No significant group differences were determined for three preference items: for mother, teacher and for friends.

Differences on the basis of sex were found with two items. Boys indicated greater preference for father ($p < .05$) and

greater social interest ($p < .05$) than did girls (Table 1). Means and standard deviations for CSSCT items for both groups of children and for boys and girls are summarized in Tables 2 and 3 respectively.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations on CSSCT Items for Head Start and Nursery School Children

CSSCT Items	Head Start Children (N=90)		Nursery School Children (N=70)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Self-esteem	10.33	4.17	11.76*	4.35
Identification with:				
Mother	7.97	2.21	4.11**	2.50
Father	7.84	2.29	3.90**	1.99
Teacher	7.91	2.00	4.64**	2.47
Friends	7.82	2.30	4.04**	1.95
Social interest	3.27	1.14	3.79*	0.74
Preference for:				
Teacher	1.49*	0.88	1.19	0.87

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations on CSSCT Items for Boys and Girls

CSSCT Items	Boys (N=94)		Girls (N=66)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Self-esteem	10.74	4.40	11.26	4.16
Identification with:				
Mother	6.15	3.12	6.47	2.88
Father	6.03	2.92	6.24	2.93
Teacher	6.28	2.80	6.77	2.65
Friends	5.93	2.86	6.52	2.84
Social interest	3.69*	0.80	3.21	1.21
Preference for:				
Father	1.72*	0.82	1.35	0.77

* $p < .01$

DISCUSSION

From the results of this study Head Start children functioned variably with self-concept (as assessed with the CSSCT). Thus, only partial support was obtained for the hypothesis that Head Start children do not differ from nursery school children along a multi-dimensional measure of self-concept.

Self-esteem

Results of the self-esteem component were less favorable with Head Start children than for nursery school children. These results may be considered in terms of previous findings regarding antecedents of self-esteem. Coopersmith (1967) found self-esteem in children to be related to several types of parental behaviors. In that study parents of children with high self-esteem demonstrated more loving and close relationships with their children than did those of children of low esteem. Parents of children with high self-esteem provided supportive and facilitating environments which revealed attitudes of acceptance appropriate to the children's ages. In addition, those parents readily engaged in administration of discipline when appropriate.

Primacy of the family setting in relation to child rearing practices is important in building self-esteem in children. Since measures relating to families of children in this study were not employed, we can only wonder if Head Start children in this study may have been exposed to less favorable home environments in some respects than were nursery school children.

Another consideration might be given to the prevailing poverty in the Head Start children's families which created eligibility for children to enroll in the program. Existing

poverty in families may have exerted strong influences on child-rearing environments and thus contributed to differences in the manner in which children learn to perceive the self.

Identification

Head Start children's low identification with significant others (father, mother, teacher and friends) revealed by placement of the "self" farther away from stimulus "persons" is indeed noteworthy, especially in view of that group's higher preference for teacher than nursery school children's. A tendency to move away from significant persons could suggest that Head Start children were less experienced in group interactions and were more reluctant to reach out and initiate or to respond to relationships with others than were nursery school children. There must be acceptable models with whom a child can identify. If such persons are not present or are not perceived as being present, identification becomes difficult to establish (Kessler, 1966, p. 30).

Social Interest

The demonstration of less social interest by Head Start children than nursery school children may be considered in terms of possible limited opportunities for social interactions for Head Start children. Early interest in interaction with others begins with family members within the home and gradually expands to include others beyond the immediate family. It is not known whether the low income levels of Head Start children may have provided limited occasions outside the home, such as party attendance and play group participation. Thus, social interest was not as fully developed among Head Start children as among

nursery school children in this study.

Preference Items

Head Start children's choices of greater preference for teacher than nursery school children's is consistent with other research. Long and Henderson (1968, p. 45) report similar findings. Disadvantaged children's generalization of maternal attachment to female teachers may account for Head Start children's choices which indicate greater teacher preference than children who were attending nursery schools. In the present study, preference for teacher could indeed represent a function of the daily Head Start center environment. The authors speculate that gratification of many of the children's basic needs may have been found in the context of a warm and nurturing teacher-child relationship. Many child successes could have resulted from teacher provision of opportunities for exploration and creativity with consequent satisfying and pleasurable experiences. Such ministrations may have provided reinforcing qualities associated with a teacher and consequently induced desire for teacher proximity by the children.

Sex Differences

Boys indicated greater preference for father than did girls (p .01). This finding is consistent with other research. Long et al (1970) found girls to demonstrate less preference for fathers than did boys. Thus it seems as though masculinity as a personality feature seems to develop early. Preference for father seems to reveal a desire to be similar in some respects to male persons. The American culture has traditionally been male-oriented in many respects. Societal pressure on boys to conform to male standards may have influenced boys to

indicate greater preference for fathers than did girls. Boys' preferences for father seem to aid them in incorporating characteristics appropriate to roles as expressed in American culture.

Boys also indicated greater social interest than did girls. Social interest is not inborn as a full fledged entity but is an innate potentiality which has to be developed. Its development resides in a social context (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 449). It appears that girls in this population of children were not as ready to enter into a wide field of human contacts as were boys. The displaying of social interest as such may represent a family function. A question may be submitted whether parents of girls may have reinforced a lack of social involvement with girls.

CONCLUSIONS

This study contributes knowledge which supports evidence for differential self-concept components between a group of Head Start children and children who attended privately operated nursery schools. We may consider questions concerning whether with low self-concepts (along dimensions assessed with the CSSCT) are likely to be regarded as maladjustment and whether those who earned high scores on CSSCT measures (suggesting higher conceptions of the self) may be viewed as well adjusted (more effective in coping with environmental stresses). Will those with low self esteem (for example) be motivated to avoid failures and establish goals conducive to limited self enhancement? Also might those with low self-esteem expect failure and tend to avoid environmental influences where failures may be expected to occur. This study did not focus on the children's adjustment. These empirical questions may be resolved through further study.

The findings of fluctuation in self-concept scores of children during middle childhood (Long, et al, 1967, p. 211) supports evidence that "Early patterns of behavior are continually vulnerable to change, and the environments of children exert powerful influences on behavior" (Lomaz, Kagan & Rosenkrantz, 1978, p. 160). Self-concept as measured with the CSSCT does not exist as a unitary process. Beliefs among preschool children concerning themselves are transient and may be modified commensurate with the power inherent in their current life situations. One should be cautioned however, that "Possibilities for change are always present, but the longer a behavior pattern persists, the more difficult it is to change" (Butler, 1969, p. 107).

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